NEW YORK TIMES
26 FEBRUARY 1983

STAT

WASHINGTON TALK

Briefing

Tennis Marched On

The blizzard of '83 choked the parking lot of the Arlington Y.M.C.A. along with the rest of the Washington area Sunday, and local tennis patrons were provoked to find an elongated Cadillac limousine and its red-lighted security car blocking access to several of the dozen available spaces. Inside the building, warming to a spirited doubles match and oblivious to the contretemps in the parking lot, were Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Richard Helms, the former Director of Central Intelligence and two companions.

Phil Gailey
Warren Weaver Jr.

Phil Gailey

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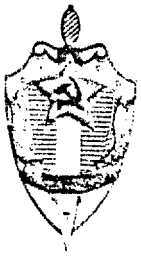
ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 49

TIME
14 FEBRUARY 1983

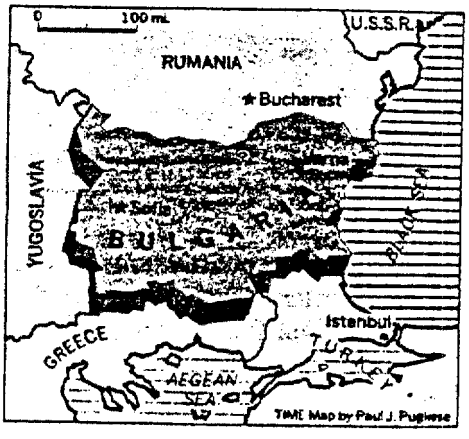
To Russia with Love

From vegetables to dirty tricks, Bulgaria gives its all



Of all the deeds ascribed to the KGB, perhaps none has drawn more outrage than the allegation that the Soviet Union, acting through Bulgaria, was behind the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. Over the decades, the U.S.S.R. has forged a special relationship with Bulgaria, relying on the tiny Balkan nation to perform myriad tasks, some nefarious, some merely fraternal. A report from that little-noticed, little-understood country:

On a square just off Sofia's Ruski Boulevard facing the National Assembly stands a statue of Tsar Alexander II, ruler of Russia from 1855 to 1881. A prerevolutionary Tsar being honored in a Communist country? History provides the explanation: Alexander II freed the Bulgarians from five centuries of Turkish rule in 1878, at a cost of 200,000 Russian lives. Unlike most of Eastern Europe, Bulgaria regards the U.S.S.R. as its liberator, not its conqueror. The two countries share the Cyrillic alphabet and speak similar languages. Though it is difficult to measure the affection felt by the Bulgarian people toward the Soviet government, there is no doubt about the official devotion of Sofia toward Moscow. As Todor Zhivkov, 71, leader of the Balkan country for the past 39 years, once characterized the relationship, "We will act as a common organism that has common lungs and a common circulatory system." Moscow, in turn, is so confident of the fealty of the country's 8.9 million people that no Soviet troops are stationed on its soil. Says an official in the West German Foreign Ministry: "The relationship is Pavlovian. The Soviets flinch, and the Bulgarians snap to."



That reputation leads Westerners to think of Bulgaria, if they think of it at all, as a sort of 16th republic of the Soviet Union. The country's roots, in fact, lie elsewhere. Its name comes from the Bulgars, a people of Turkic origin that moved south of the Danube and into present-day Bulgaria in the 7th century. Conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1396, the Bulgarians spent the next 500 years under the yoke of Constantinople before being set free by the Tsar's forces. During both world wars the country sided with Germany, but it could never bring itself to declare war against the Soviet Union. In 1944, the regency of seven-year-old King Siméon II scrambled to forge a separate peace with the Allies, but to no avail. Stalin's troops marched through the country unopposed and a coalition government was installed, with the Communists gaining complete control by 1946.

With help from Moscow, postwar Bulgaria was transformed from a peasant nation of primitive farms into the Socialist version of agribusiness. At the end of World War II fewer than 2% of agricultural plots were larger than 50 acres; by 1970 the average collective or state farm covered more than 10,000 acres. Bulgaria is more than just a vegetable patch: it is the world's second largest exporter of cigarettes, with most of its Shipkas and Stewardesses going to the Soviet Union, and it provides nearly half the world's rose attar, an ingredient in perfumes.

During the 1950s, Bulgaria shifted into industrial gear. Today its industries account for nearly half of the gross national product, while agricultural output makes up only 18%. A Bulgarian firm called Balkancar is one of the world's largest producers of forklifts. Economic growth in 1982 was about 2.5%, one of the highest among the Soviet satellites. Moscow is both a customer and a supplier: it buys about half of Bulgaria's exports and provides 90% of its oil. Consumer prices are relatively high for a Soviet-bloc country ($2 per lb. for pork, $200 for a small TV set), but goods are widely available.

■ Leader Todor Zhivkov

Given its reputation for Balkan intrigue, the country itself strikes visitors as remarkably serene. In Sofia, a charming if somewhat dowdy city of more than 1 million, main boulevards are lined with massive public edifices, and cobbled side streets are crammed with quaint but tumble-down houses of stucco and red tile. Although policemen can be seen directing traffic, the uniformed squadrons that patrol some other Soviet-bloc capitals are absent; if the police are out of sight, they can nonetheless appear on the scene when necessary. The coast along the Black Sea is dotted with hotels built to attract Western tourists (and their currency), but the mountains and high plains are sprinkled with villages that appear to have changed little since the days of Alexander II.

Zhivkov, who has been in power long-

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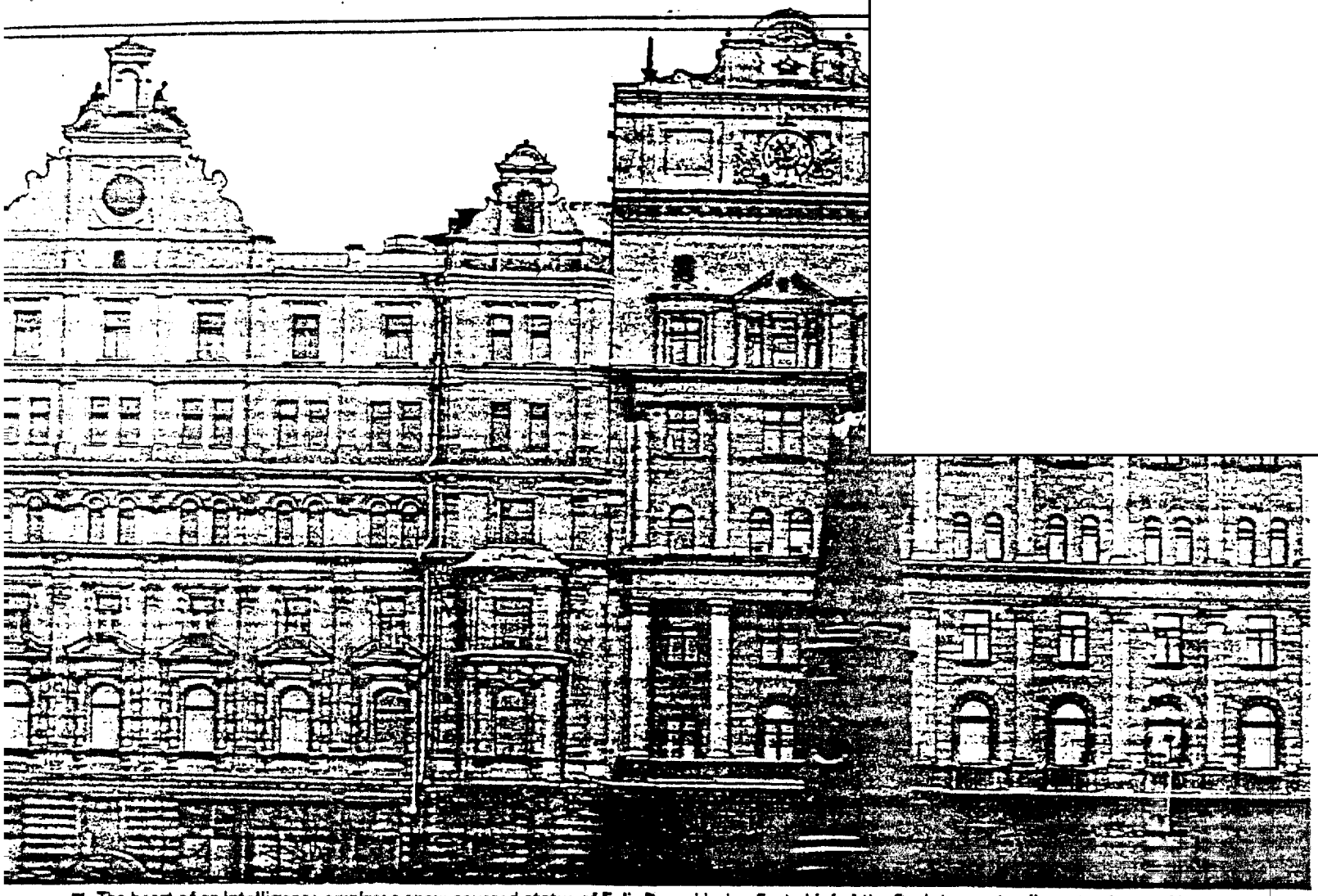
ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 30

TIME
14 FEBRUARY 1983



■ The heart of an intelligence empire: a snow-covered statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, first chief of the Soviet secret police, stands guard in front of KGB headquarters in central Moscow

The KGB

Eyes of the Kremlin

The new KGB: how Andropov's agents watch the home front and the world

Four hours after the funeral of Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev last November, an incident that would have seemed improbable in the most contrived spy thriller unfolded in the Green Room of the Kremlin. As leader of the American delegation attending the Brezhnev burial, Vice President George Bush had been invited for a private chat with the new Communist Party chief, Yuri Andropov. The atmosphere was stiffly formal. Bush, who had been director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1976 to 1977, tried to break the ice with a bit of humor. Said the Vice President: "I feel I already know you, since we

bifocals and smiled enigmatically. For the first time in history, a former director of the CIA had come to visit the onetime head of the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* (Committee for State Security), known worldwide by three letters: KGB.

As Andropov well knew, there is nothing at all similar about the position Bush held for a year and the powers that the Soviet leader wielded for 15 years as chief of the world's largest spy and state-security machine. From an office in the [illegible] headquarters at 2 Dzerzhinsky Square,*

barely a mile from the Kremlin, the head of the KGB oversees an intricate network of espionage and information-gathering operations that further the political objectives of the Communist Party. Unlike the CIA, the KGB works both abroad and at home, doing for the U.S.S.R. what the CIA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Security Agency and the Secret Service do for the U.S.—and a good deal more. The KGB chief commands an army of some 700,000 agents and about as many [illegible] a U.S. intelligence and counterintelligence network of only 130,000), most of whom keep watch on

*Felix Dzerzhinsky, an aristocratic Pole turned rev-

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 36

7 FEBRUARY 1983

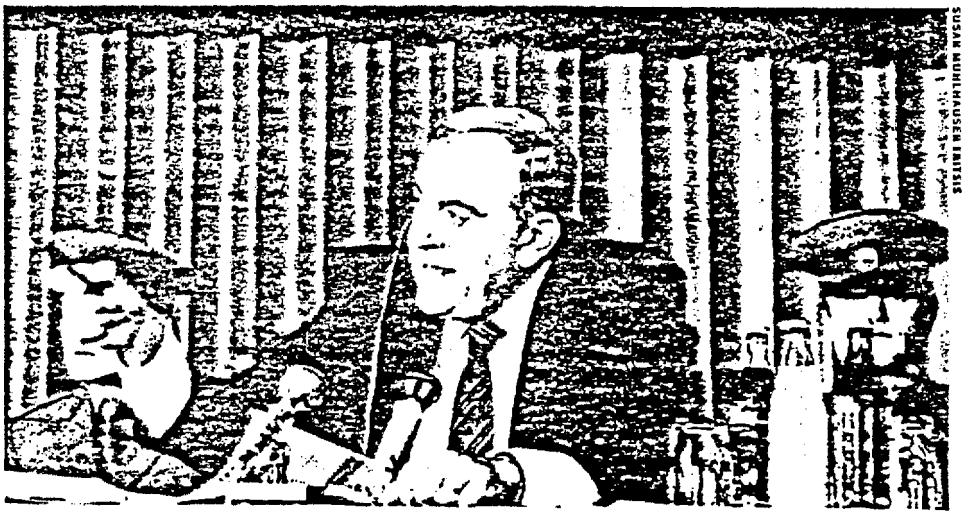
TERRORISM

New Pieces for the Puzzle

More hints that the Pope's attacker had help

Wiretaps of phone calls in which the Turkish gunman mutters that he received the money and says he will now carry out his assignment. Reports that the gunman met with a suspected Bulgarian agent at a small hotel in Rome to plot the murder of Polish Labor Leader Lech Walesa. Word that a key witness recants her testimony and thus threatens the alibi of the Bulgarian, who issues a denial that he aided the Turk in any way.

Investigating the 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II is like putting together a maddeningly complex jigsaw puzzle. The picture remains far from complete, and there is no proof of the growing suspicion that the Soviet Union, acting through Bulgaria, was behind Turkish Terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca's effort to kill the Pope, or even aware of the attempt. But the latest fragments make the inquiry more tantalizing than ever.



Turkish Businessman Bekir Çelenk denying that he paid Agca to kill the Pope

What to make of calls from Majorca, a meeting in Zurich, and a man named "Morat."

According to published reports of his confession to Italian Judge Ilario Martella last year, Agca contended that during a seven-week stay in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia in 1980, he was offered $1.5 million to kill the Pope. The man Agca said made the proposition is Bekir Çelenk, a shadowy Turkish businessman whose dealings often brought him to Bulgaria. Çelenk last week again denied that he had ever met Agca, but he admitted that the two had stayed at the same Sofia hotel at the same time in July 1980.

After leaving Sofia in August 1980, Agca traveled freely throughout Western Europe, stopping several times in Rome. He claimed to have met three Bulgarians during these visits, including Sergei

this trio, Agca said, he made final plans to murder the Pope.

Agca's contention that the Bulgarians conspired with him remains unproven. But intriguing details keep emerging that support Agca's account of his activities before the shooting. In a meeting on March 3, 1981, at the Hotel Rütli in Zurich, Musa Serdar Çelebi, a right-wing Turkish activist with links to Çelenk and Bulgaria, also offered Agca $1.5 million to kill the Pope. Çelebi reportedly was acting as middleman for Çelenk, and may have been either simply renewing his fellow Turk's offer or actually paying Agca the money. Some time in late April or early May, according to Swiss and German wiretaps cited in a television documentary broadcast by NBC last week, Agca, staying in Majorca, telephoned Çelebi in Frankfurt. The gunman reportedly said, "I have received the sum we agreed. I'll go to Rome to carry it out." Agca allegedly then called another Turk, Omer Bagci, a restaurant worker in a Zurich suburb, and instructed him to deposit in a baggage room at the railroad station in Milan the Browning 9-mm semiautomatic pistol used in the papal shooting. On May 9, according to Agca, he arrived in Milan from his Majorca sojourn and picked up the gun. Four days later, he was standing in St. Peter's Square waiting for his victim.

Interrogated by Martella in Frankfurt late last year, Çelebi repeatedly denied ever knowing or having contact with Agca. He changed his story when the Italian judge confronted him with telephone records showing calls between himself and Agca. Çelebi then admitted that he

man $350, but only because he thought Morat was broke and felt sorry for him. Çelebi says that he asked the stranger if he would like to work for Türk Föderation, a right-wing expatriate group in West Germany, but that was all.

Morat, of course, is the man the world now knows as Agca. Though West German authorities do not contest the phone calls between Agca and Çelebi in Europe, they deny that they tapped Agca's telephone conversations with Çelebi or possess records of Acga's calls from Majorca. According to Turkish intelligence officials, Agca was in touch with other Turks in West Germany as well; shortly before the assassination try, Agca telephoned a Turkish-owned import-export firm in Munich named Varda. Though there is no record of who at the company spoke with Agca, one of its employees is Omer Marsen, a Turkish businessman who knows Çelebi and allegedly supplied Agca with a fake Turkish passport.

Agca apparently had other targets in mind as well. TIME has confirmed that the Turk told Italian authorities that in January 1981 he met with Antonov at the Hotel Archimede in Rome to discuss killing Walesa, who was in the Italian capital visiting Pope John Paul II. The attempt did not take place, and Antonov's lawyer contends that Italian authorities have never brought up the allegation. Antonov remains in jail in Rome while Martella continues his investigation. The Bulgarian has denied ever aiding Agca, but last week his defense showed signs of unraveling. TIME has learned that of the eight witnesses produced by Antonov to provide alibis for the Bulgarian's movements immediately before the papal shooting, only one, a middle-aged Italian woman, is not Bulgarian. She has reportedly told Italian authorities that she can no longer swear with certainty that she spotted Antonov at the times and places she originally mentioned.

Meanwhile, Martella's inquiry goes on. Intelligence agencies in both Western Europe and the U.S. are saying nothing about the case until the Italians complete their investigations. But some officials are contending that the CIA has been notably reluctant to pursue it. The State Department denies the charge, and the CIA will not comment, but others point out that the agency's lack of interest may stem from embarrassment at not detecting a possible Soviet connection in the first place. Says Richard Helms, director of the CIA from 1966 to 1973: "The CIA appears to have been outgunned on this. They're miffed about something." In any event, the agency and its West European counterparts probably should have been more curious about a case that raises the question of whether the Soviets would be willing to countenance the murder of the world's most prominent religious